

---

## **APPENDIX J - ADDENDUM FROM HARVARD UNIVERSITY**



Office of Government, Community  
And Public Affairs  
02138

77 Brattle Street  
Cambridge, Massachusetts,

Tel: (617) 495-4955  
Fax: (617) 495-9703

## **ADDENDUM TO THE RIVERSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY**

January 2003

### **Introduction**

As a property owner in the Riverside neighborhood, Harvard University has been a participant in the Riverside Study Committee process since its formation in 2001. This process was initiated after Riverside residents petitioned for a development moratorium in an effort to halt Harvard's planning of an art museum to be built on a parcel on Memorial Drive that has been owned by the university since 1926. Harvard participated on the Committee with the objective to:

- Address the community's concerns regarding the impacts of development of university property, and to
- Create appropriate transitions between institutional development and lower scale abutting neighboring neighborhoods.

Throughout the process, Harvard focused on ways that university utilization of its own land could be achieved in a manner that both meets Harvard's academic and institutional needs and also responds to neighborhood interests. The university found, however, that the goal of appropriate and mutually beneficial university development was not embraced by the Riverside Study Committee; rather, the Study Committee focused on zoning that prevented all new institutional uses on Harvard-owned property. The Study Committee vigorously pursued proposals to create all open space at the site and investigated the option of a City taking of the property through eminent domain for use as a park. The Study Committee considered a "horticultural zone" in which only horticultural uses would be allowed on Harvard-owned property and also considered zoning the site as an open space district. The Study Committee was advised by the City that these zoning options would not stand up to legal scrutiny. The Study Committee dismissed the university's interests as a property owner to utilize its property for institutional purposes and recommended zoning that prevented all new institutional uses on Harvard-owned property. As a result of the Study Committee's hostility toward Harvard's museum proposal, the university withdrew the proposal

recognizing that intense community opposition made the project infeasible since many City and state approvals would be required for the project to succeed.

For these reasons, and because the University's position was in the minority and not reflected in the Study Committee's recommendations, Harvard University respectfully submits this addendum.

### **The Case for Opposing Riverside Study Committee Zoning Recommendations**

The university opposed the Study Committee's final downzoning recommendations (that were later put forward as the Carlson petition) because the intention was to so severely restrict development that it would effectively prevent all new institutional use on Harvard's Riverside properties. Zoning recommendations should have allowed institutional development that respects the scale and context of existing surrounding buildings and addresses project impacts.

#### Severe Downzoning Rather than Transition Zoning:

The Study Committee recommendations called for severe downzoning rather than transition zoning of Harvard property. Instead of bridging height differences between districts that currently permit tall buildings - and areas characterized by lower-scale residential buildings, the recommendations severely constrain allowable heights. Even prior to the formation of the Study Committee, Harvard had proposed voluntary height restrictions of University property that grew out of a community process that Harvard initiated in 1999. The proposal significantly reduced heights from the allowed 120' to 65', 45' and 35' with the lowest heights nearest to the neighborhood edge and the higher building heights (a reduction of nearly half of the existing height) adjacent to taller institutional buildings. In voluntarily offering height restrictions of Harvard's property at Banks, Grant and Cowperthwaite streets, the university was supporting the transitional zoning criteria established by the Citywide Growth Management Advisory Committee. Transitional zoning was recently adopted by the City Council for the Hammond Street edge after Harvard initiated a similar consultative community process. The Study Committee rejected the transition recommendations for Banks, Grant and Cowperthwaite streets.

The Study Committee's recommended dimensional restrictions are inappropriate, because they do not reflect the size and character of surrounding structures in the urban riverfront context, and in fact impose more severe constraints on development than in any other zoning district in the City. At 870-888 Memorial Drive, which Harvard currently leases to Mahoney's Garden Center, and at Blackstone Station that generates steam for the majority of the university's campus, the Study Committee's downzoning recommendations would result in an 80% reduction in allowable height and FAR. The Committee's recommended dimensional controls would create significant nonconformities at Blackstone Station and would effectively prohibit use of Harvard's 870-888 Memorial Drive site for institutional housing. At Harvard's property at Banks, Grant and Cowperthwaite streets, the downzoning proposals would result in an 80% reduction in allowable height and a 71% reduction in allowable FAR.

### Exclusion of All New Institutional Use on University Land:

The Study Committee's downzoning recommendations are not consistent with any proposed university use and would prohibit educational institutional uses on property Harvard has owned for decades. In the Banks/Grant/Cowperthwaite Street area, which is contiguous to the Harvard campus, institutional uses would be prohibited on all Harvard-owned land outside of the Institutional Overlay District. The resulting Carlson petition called for the removal of land that Harvard has owned for more than 30 years from the Institutional Overlay District, which further unreasonably restricts the university's ability to use its existing property.

At 870-888 Memorial Drive, which Harvard has owned for 75 years, the university presented analyses of the impact of both museum and housing development. The proposed museum would have created limited impacts in this area: It was designed at less than half the height and less than half the FAR allowed by current zoning. To keep the overall height of the museum low, a significant portion of the museum space was proposed underground. The museum was designed so that approximately 50% of the site was landscaped green space. In addition, a museum use would have negligible effects upon the existing traffic levels of service, as determined by both the traffic consultant engaged by the university and the traffic consultant to the Cambridge Community Development Department. In response to the Study Committee's desire to see further traffic reductions and greater open space, Harvard studied graduate student housing (including 15% affordable community units) as an alternative use and presented studies to the Study Committee. The development of graduate student housing would generate less traffic than either the existing commercial use, or the proposed museum use and also increase opportunities for landscaped areas to be planned as an amenity. However, under the Study Committee's downzoning recommendations, neither the museum nor housing alternatives could be accommodated due to severe dimensional controls and use restrictions. Furthermore, the Study Committee's downzoning makes it infeasible for the university to develop the property, which will have the sad effect of eliminating community affordable units that would have been built if Harvard were able to develop its property. In fact, the Study Committee recommendations would reduce the amount of community affordable housing that could be built by approximately 85%.

At Blackstone Station, the Study Committee recommendations called for prohibition of institutional uses and permitted only a narrow range of low-density residential uses for a complex of unique industrial buildings that would require significant flexibility to facilitate their redevelopment.

### **The Role of the University in Mitigating Traffic and Parking Impacts**

The Riverside Study Committee focused on many traffic, transportation, and parking issues in their discussions and final report. As the largest employer in the City of Cambridge, it is important to understand the many efforts that Harvard undertakes to ease traffic and parking problems and to encourage students, faculty and staff to use alternative modes of transportation.

### Harvard Generates Less Traffic than Commercial Uses:

More flexible academic schedules and work hours result in less intensive traffic patterns than other traditional businesses. For example, one-third of Harvard's Cambridge-based employees are non-peak-hour commuters. Non-peak commuters reduce traffic congestion by distributing traffic impacts, including transit, vehicular, and pedestrian. Just in the past year and as a result of expanded transportation demand management initiatives, the university reduced single occupant vehicle ("SOV") use translating into a reduction of 2,579 commuter trips into the campus area and a 5.5 percent increase in public transit usage. The university also provides a free campus shuttle service and has a comprehensive CommuterChoice program to encourage faculty and staff to use alternative means of transportation. Employees at Harvard are eligible for a 40% discount on monthly MBTA passes.

Almost 75 percent of employees who are commuters living within Boston's Inner Ring suburbs use alternative transportation modes to work. The high rate of alternative mode used by Harvard's employees demonstrates the university's commitment to reduce the number of auto trips made by SOVs into its Cambridge campus and to increase trips by high occupancy vehicles ("HOVs") such as trains, buses, vans, carpools. More than 25 percent of Harvard's commuting population uses public transit to get to work, leaving their cars at home. In addition, Harvard has a high bicycle and walk-to-work rates, 8 and 32 percent respectively. Harvard's walk rate is nearly eight times the Massachusetts' walk rate.

### Very Few Harvard Undergraduates Park in Cambridge:

Harvard undergraduates are discouraged from bringing a car to campus and must register to park in Allston. Except for disabled students, undergraduates are not allowed to park their cars in Cambridge with a Harvard University parking permit. When studied by the City this year, only 37 City parking permits had been issued to the 3,300 undergraduate students living in the River Houses.

### Harvard's Shuttle Service Helps Reduce Car Trips:

The Harvard University Shuttle Service operates bus service during the academic year (except during holiday and semester breaks) providing safe, convenient transportation throughout the Cambridge and Allston campuses. The Shuttle reduces trips and limits the need for students to have a car. Shuttle bus rides are free to all members of the Harvard community, including faculty, staff and students. Fully accessible vehicles also operate year round to transport persons with mobility impairments.

## **Conclusion**

As a participant in the Riverside Study Committee and as a landowner in Riverside, Harvard could not support the Study Committee's recommendations that so severely restrict development that all new institutional use on Harvard's Riverside properties is effectively prevented. Over the past years Harvard has undertaken efforts on many levels, from initiating and participating in planning processes to create transition areas, to instituting new transportation programs and creating a new Riverside community garden -- each with the goal to improve the quality of life for both the Harvard community and Riverside residents. Given that Harvard has long-term stake in the vitality and health of this neighborhood, we hope that future planning and development in Riverside can meet the interests of both the university and the neighborhood.